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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in Scotland's Lothian region to ascertain views on education provision for children under age 5. Subjects were over 400 nursery nurses, more than 1,100 parents, and staff members, at 175 nursery schools. The research questions covered six areas: (1) background information on parents and children; (2) benefits of nursery education for children and their families and improvements that parents would like to see; (3) staff feelings about meeting the needs of children and their families and staff priorities in the provision they make; (4) staff overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with opportunities available for professional development; (5) preferences held by both parents and staff concerning parental involvement in nursery education and how these preferences match with actual practices; and (6) kinds and levels of inter-agency work existing in Lothian nurseries. Results indicated that parents felt generally very happy with the nursery school or class their children attended, but would like more provision to be available. Suggested improvements involved providing more places, giving children more time at nursery, and allowing younger children into the system. Helping children prepare for school, giving them the chance to mix with other children, and contributing to their education were the main reasons parents gave for using the services. The majority of teachers and nursery nurses were satisfied with their present jobs but identified further areas for inservice requirements, especially for working with special needs children and with parents. Fairly large numbers of nurseries reported receiving support from other professionals such as speech professionals and psychologists, and well over three-quarters of nursery schools and classes were involved in pre-entry work with primary schools. (AA)

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Educational Provision for Pre-fives in Lothian Region

A summary of the views of
parents and staff

*Stuart Hall
Janet Powney*

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*Stuart Hall
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The Scottish Council for
Research in Education

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Introduction to summary of findings

Lothian Regional Council commissioned the Scottish Council for Research in Education to carry out a survey of parents and staff about their views on services for the under-fives and in particular 'rural position' part-time nurseries. All 175 nursery education establishments were sent questionnaires for headteachers, teachers in charge of nursery classes and a sample of more than 400 nursery nurses. Over 1100 parents were also surveyed.

1 Summary of findings

Lothian Region commissioned the Scottish Council for Research in Education to carry out a survey of parent and staff views on the education services provided by the Region's Education Department. In particular the researchers looked at 'rural position', part-time nurseries operating on only two days each week and staffed by a nursery nurse on both days and a teacher on one of these days. The survey covered headteachers of nursery schools and teachers in charge of nursery classes (a total of 175 establishments), over 400 nursery nurses and more than 1100 parents

Background information on parents and children.

The main findings:

- The most common type of family using Lothian's nurseries was one with two carers where the male worked full-time and the female either stayed at home or worked part-time.
- 14% of those participating in the survey were from single parent households.
- The majority of children attended on a five day a week part-time (morning or afternoon) basis.
- Over a quarter of parents using 'mainstream' nurseries and over half of parents using 'rural position' nurseries also used other childcare services.

What are the benefits of nursery education for children and their families and what improvements would parents like to see?

The main findings:

- There was a high degree of agreement between parents, teachers and nursery nurses about the benefits for children from nursery attendance.
- Parents, teachers and nursery nurses considered that the main benefits for children attending the nursery were:
 - allowing children to socialise with other children
 - promoting the general all-round development of children
 - promoting the educational development of children
 - preparing children for school
 - giving children access to new equipment, experiences, or resources
 - providing a safe and caring environment.
- Parents generally recorded a high degree of satisfaction with the aspects of the nursery that they were asked about.

- Most of the parental suggestions for improving the service involved:
 - making more places available
 - giving children more time in the nursery (this was especially true of 'rural position' parents)
 - allowing more younger children into the system.

Do staff feel that the service is meeting the needs of children and their families and what are their own priorities in the provision they make?

The main findings:

- There was broad agreement between nursery nurses and teachers that the major aims and priorities of the nurseries were:
 - development of the children's language
 - providing the opportunity for children to mix with other children
 - providing a high quality environment.
- Priorities were defined largely with reference to children and not to any wider needs of the parent.
- Parents' main reasons for using the nurseries were:
 - helping their children prepare for school
 - giving their children a chance to mix with other children
 - helping to educate their children.
- Overall parents reported themselves and their children as very happy with the service.
- The majority of 'mainstream' nurseries reported having children with special needs and these needs included:
 - major learning difficulties
 - children requiring a special diet
 - children for whom English was a second language
 - children with social/emotional difficulties
 - children with severe physical disabilities.

Do staff gain overall job satisfaction and are they content with the opportunities available for professional development?

The main findings:

- The majority of teachers and nursery nurses were satisfied with their present jobs.
- A majority of the staff had attended inservice programmes in the recent past and were generally satisfied with them.
- Staff identified further areas for inservice requirements especially for 'working with children with special needs' and 'working with parents'.

What are the preferences held by both parents and staff concerning parental involvement in nursery education and how do these match with actual practices?

The main findings:

- While most parental involvement was of a fairly routine nature, involving the exchange of information, it was also quite common for parents to be involved in working with the children in the nursery.
- There appeared to be a gap in the knowledge of a large number of parents about the nurseries' progress reports on their children.

One additional area asked about during the study concerned intra-agency and inter-agency working.

What kind and levels of inter-agency work existed in Lothian nurseries?

The main findings:

- Well over three-quarters of nursery schools and classes in Lothian Region were involved in pre-entry work with primary schools.
- Fairly large numbers of nurseries reported getting support from other professionals including speech therapists, health visitors and psychologists. Just over half of the nurseries said they received support from education officers and advisers.
- A large number of nurseries reported having various students on placement with them over the last 18 months.

2 Background and aims

■ Introduction

In January 1994 Lothian Region Education Department commissioned the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) to undertake an initial survey of parents and staff in its nursery schools and classes.

Over the last eight years Lothian Region has made efforts to improve its nursery provision and by March 1994 the Region was able to offer all 4-year-olds a nursery place. In this context it was felt appropriate to carry out research in order to assess the satisfaction of providers and users of nursery education, thereby complementing the factual information already available via the regular returns made by nurseries to the Region. Additionally Lothian Region had developed a 'rural position' whereby it had set up 13 small part-time nurseries in some rural areas where, previously, there were no Regional pre-five services. Each of these nurseries operates two days per week, staffed by a nursery nurse on both days and a teacher on one of these days. The Education Department was very keen to assess the success of this initiative.

The survey was intended to gain the views of parents and staff about the service, focusing on the following questions:

- What are the benefits of nursery education for children and their families and what improvements would parents like to see?
- Do staff feel that the service is meeting the needs of children and their families and what are their own priorities in the provision they make?
- Do staff gain overall job satisfaction and are they content with the opportunities available for professional development?
- What are the preferences held by parents and staff concerning parental involvement in nursery education and how do these match with actual practices?

■ The survey

It was decided, in discussion with Regional Officers, that the most appropriate research method would involve postal questionnaires with a high degree of pre-coding to reduce the time taken to complete the questionnaire and thus help maximise the return rate. Pre-coded questionnaires have a choice of possible answers (often just yes or no) to each question from which the respondent selects and ticks the appropriate answers. In addition pre-coding helps speed up the processing of data, an important consideration in this instance with such a tight schedule for an interim report for committee.

At the same time as the Lothian research was being conducted, the SCRE researchers were also engaged on a two year, Scottish Office funded, project

looking at provision for pre-five's in Scotland. Experience gained from this project made the construction of questionnaires for the Lothian initiative much easier and obviated the necessity for full piloting of the questionnaires.

All 175 nursery schools or classes within the responsibility of Lothian Education Department were asked to participate in the research.

Through out this report the term 'nursery' is used to denote both nursery schools and classes.

■ Sample and response rates

The region was interested in views of parents and staff. Questionnaires were sent to head teachers of nursery schools and teachers in charge of nursery classes, with accompanying questionnaires for all nursery nurses. The teacher questionnaires were longer than those used for nursery nurses since they collected extra information on the staff complement and the children using the facilities: there was therefore no need to duplicate these factual questions on the other questionnaires.

Questionnaires were also distributed to one in ten parents for each nursery with the exception of the thirteen 'rural position' nurseries each of which had only ten places available. The normal selection procedure would have meant only one family per nursery being asked to fill in a questionnaire, and a maximum of thirteen responses. Therefore in the case of 'rural position' nurseries every family on the register was asked to complete a questionnaire.

Throughout this report the term 'mainstream' nursery is used to distinguish nursery schools and classes from those designated 'rural position' nurseries.

All questionnaires were distributed through Lothian's internal mailing service, with each centre being sent an information sheet, questionnaires for completion by staff, and questionnaires to be distributed to parents with sealable return envelopes.

Copies of the three questionnaires are available from SCRE on request. The following table summarises sample sizes and response rates.

	Sample	Responses	Response rate %
HT/Teacher	175	156	89
Nursery nurses	405	348	86
Parents	1196	998	83

Response rates of 83% and over are well above what would normally be expected from a postal questionnaire, and suggest a high degree of willingness on the part of staff and parents to participate in the survey. High response rates boost the reliability of the findings.

Returns were received from eleven (85%) of the 'rural position' nurseries. While this does not give a particularly high number of teachers (11) and nursery nurses (11) on the basis of which to make comparisons with staff in mainstream nurseries, it does yield a sufficiently high number of parental responses (85). Consequently this report highlights differences and similarities in the responses from those using 'mainstream' nurseries and 'rural position' nurseries wherever appropriate.

3 Information about staff and parents

■ Staff

Of the 156 teachers questionnaires returned, 41 had been filled in by headteachers of nursery schools and 115 by teachers of nursery classes. Only one of these questionnaires had been completed by a male.

Of the 348 questionnaires from nursery nurses, three were indicated as having been completed by a male. There were ten instances where the respondent had failed to indicate their sex and in the remaining 335 cases the respondents were female.

Information on staff numbers was available from 141 nurseries, of which 68 (48%) had no more than three childcare staff (teachers and nursery nurses) in total. A further 58 (41%) had between four and six staff. Only 15 (11%) had more than six staff members.

The headteachers/teachers were asked about the ethnic origin of childcare staff in the nursery school/class. Obtaining information on this subject is fraught with problems and in this instance these were compounded by confusion on the part of some of respondents whose replies referred to the children attending the nursery rather than to the staff. Of the 156 returned questionnaires 117 (75%) provided usable information on this subject. Eight nurseries reported having staff of Indian or Pakistani background, four reported having staff of Chinese or Asian origin, and three reported having staff of African or Black origin (see Appendix Table 1). None of the 'rural position' nurseries reported staff other than White British.

■ Parents

Of the 998 parental questionnaires 782 (78%) were completed by a female carer. In 145 cases (15%) both carers had filled in the questionnaire and in only 25 instances (3%) was the questionnaire completed by a male carer alone. (In 46 instances this question was not answered.)

Parents were asked several questions about themselves and their home situation. It is important to be aware of the fact that parents using pre-five services are likely to come from a range of family circumstances.

Parents were asked about their household composition: 14% of all parents responding indicated that they were living in single parent households while 86% of all parents were part of a two parent household. However if we separate out those parents using the 'rural position' nurseries from those attending the 'mainstream' provision the picture is somewhat different. While 15% of the parents using mainstream provision live in single parent households the figure is only 6% for parents using the 'rural position' nurseries.

Respondents were asked about their own work status and that of their partner where applicable (see Appendix Tables 2 and 3). The figures for both 'rural position' and 'mainstream' users were similar with around 1 in 10 respondents reporting working full-time while around 4 out of 10 were working part-time. On the other hand approximately half were not working. As reported above, almost 4 out of 5 respondents completing the questionnaire were female. The data for their partners, likely to be predominately male, indicates that the vast majority, around 80% were working full-time.

Taken together, this data would suggest that the most common type of family using Lothian's nurseries is one with two carers where the male works full-time and the female either stays at home or works part-time. Nevertheless the services are used by a substantial minority of families with only one parent or carer.

■ Attendance at the nursery

Over 80% of children attending mainstream nurseries used them on a five day a week part-time (morning or afternoon) basis. Figures for attendance are given in Appendix Table 4. As for the 'rural position' nurseries, almost all of the children (98%) attended on a part-time basis for one session (morning or afternoon) on the two days each week that the service was available.

■ Use of other child care services

Parents were asked whether they used any other childcare services or help in addition to the nursery. For 'mainstream' nursery users just over one quarter (27%) indicated they used other services. In the case of 'rural position' nursery users the figure was substantially higher with well over half (58%) indicating that they used other services. Furthermore, around 20% of 'rural position' users were using more than one additional form of childcare provision, as compared to around 7% of mainstream users. These findings are likely to reflect the shorter periods of attendance available from 'rural position' nurseries (see above).

The figures for other childcare services used are contained in Appendix Table 5. These show that two types of additional provision were much more likely to be used by 'rural position' nursery users. Firstly, a much higher percentage of 'rural position' users (38%) reported also using playgroups as compared to 'mainstream' users (2%). Secondly, 9% of 'rural position' nursery users reported using private nurseries, as compared to 1% of 'mainstream' nursery users. This difference may indicate differences in the socio-economic status of the families, with 'rural position' parents being more able to afford the charges levied by private nurseries. Certainly this view is supported by the information that proportionately, two and a half times as many respondents from single parent households were recorded using the 'mainstream' nurseries as 'rural position' nurseries, as single parent households are much more likely to live at or below the poverty line than two parent households. About one in five users of 'mainstream' and 'rural position' nurseries also have additional childcare support from family and friends.

4 Answering the research questions

Research Area 1

What are the benefits of nursery education for children and their families and what improvements would parents like to see?

Benefits from nursery attendance

Nursery education is currently receiving a high profile in Britain. Much publicity is being given to the results of the American longitudinal study, High Scope. The most recent publication arising from the study, *Significant Benefits: The High Scope Perry Pre-school Study Through Age 27*, (Schweinhart and Wiekart (1993), London) which highlights the beneficial impact of nursery attendance and early intervention on the educational and social outcomes for children. Exploring ideas about the benefits of nursery attendance was one of the main areas which Lothian wished to investigate.

Parents, teachers and nursery nurses were asked for their views on the benefits for children of attending the nursery school. Unlike most of the other questions contained in the questionnaires this was open ended and the comments received were categorised after the questionnaires were returned. The six commonest types of response to this question, on the part of all three groups, were:

- allowing children to socialise with other children
- promoting the general all-round development of children
- promoting the educational development of children
- preparing children for school
- giving children access to new equipment, experiences, or resources
- providing a safe and caring environment.

As Appendix Table 6 shows, there is some variation in the actual ranking of these categories from group to group. 'Socialising with other children' was by far the most common response from both nursery nurses and parents, but was second to 'general all round development' among teachers. Although 'preparation for school' ranked number 6 among teachers it was the 3rd most frequently mentioned benefit by nursery nurses and 4th by parents.

It is of note that none of the responding groups most commonly mentioned 'preparation for school' as a benefit. While this result from the teachers and nursery nurses may be of little surprise, it is probably more so from the parents, often thought of as seeing nursery provision in terms of preparation for school. Below the 6 most common responses the proportions in the other categories becomes rather small.

When asked if there were any disadvantages for children in attending the nursery, the vast majority of parents (93%), three-quarters of nursery nurses

(75%), and just under half of the teachers (45%) said there were no disadvantages. The most commonly specified disadvantages (see Appendix Table 7 for details) were:

- among parents - that the provision was only part-time (11% also suggested that the premises or environment were lacking and a further 11% suggested that they had to travel a distance)
- among teachers - that they lacked resources or the day was too long for some children
- among nursery nurses - that the nursery environment did not suit all children and that provision was only part-time.

Although only nine (11%) of the 'rural position' parents suggested that there were disadvantages, all nine identified the part-time nature of the provision as a disadvantage.

Suggested improvements

Parents were asked what they thought would be the most important improvement which Lothian Region could make to its nurseries. Of the suggestions made the most frequent (see Appendix Table 8 for details) were:

- making more resources available for the nursery
- making more places available for children
- extending provision for children under 4 within the system.

There were some differences between the responses of 'rural position' parents and those using 'mainstream' provision. In the case of parents using 'rural position' nurseries the percentage making suggestions for improvements were higher than in the 'mainstream' nurseries. Fifty nine (70%) of the 'rural position' parents suggested extending the provision for their child. This was by far and away the most common response from these parents. Clearly they saw extending the time that the provision was available to them as the most important area for improvement. In the case of the 'mainstream' parents, who generally have access to more days in the nursery than the 'rural position' parents, extending the provision for their children was no more important than other suggestions for expanding the provision within Lothian.

Rating aspects of the nursery

Parents were also asked to rate several aspects of the nursery and its work including the helpfulness of staff, their happiness with the activities that their children were engaged in and whether or not they were consulted over changes in the nursery. This data is ranked and detailed in Appendix Table 9.

Almost 90% of all parents indicated that they were always very happy with the care and safety of their children and that the nursery staff were always helpful, 81% were always happy with the activities that their children were involved in, and 97% were always or usually happy with their child's education. There was a little more uncertainty over being informed about the nurseries work and more uncertainty over being consulted over changes in the nursery. In the latter case just over one quarter of parents said that they were either only consulted sometimes or were never consulted. (Findings were almost identical for 'mainstream' and 'rural position' users.)

Summary of findings from Research Area 1

This section highlights three main points in relation to the perceived benefits of nursery education and the nature of improvements suggested by parents:

- 1 There is a high degree of agreement between parents, teachers and nursery nurses about the benefits for children from nursery attendance.
- 2 Parents generally recorded a high degree of satisfaction with the aspects of the nursery which they were asked to rate.
- 3 Most of the suggestions for improving the service tended to involve extending the provision, either by making more places available, by giving children more time in the nursery, or by allowing more younger children into the system.

Research Area 2

Do staff feel that the service is meeting the needs of children and their families and what are their own priorities in the provision they make?

Aims of the nursery school or class

Teachers and nursery nurses were asked to rate a list of ten aims with reference to their own nursery. Results are illustrated in Appendix Tables 10-19. The proportion of teachers and nursery nurses giving a 'very important' rating was broadly similar for all of the aims, with the exception of 'helping the children prepare for school' which was regarded as very important by 71% of nursery nurses but only 56% of teachers. As indicated in the table below, the three most important aims for both groups were the 'development of children's language', 'providing the opportunity for children to mix with other children' and 'providing a high quality environment'.

Most important aims of the nursery

	% of teachers	% of nursery nurses
1 Providing a high quality environment	97	87
2 Helping to develop children's language	97	91
3 Providing the opportunity for children to mix	86	89

The least important aims for teachers and nursery nurses were those which related to meeting the needs of the parents, such as 'allowing parents respite from their children', and 'allowing parents to return to education or work'.

Least important aims of the nursery

	% of teachers	% of nursery nurses
8 Allowing parents respite from their children	9	7
9 Allowing parents to return to education	6	5
10 Allowing parents to train for or attend work	5	3

Priorities of the nursery school or class

Teachers and nursery nurses were presented with a list of seven criteria and asked to select the three most important in deciding if a child would get priority for a place in their establishment (see Appendix Table 20). Teachers and nursery nurses were in general agreement about selection criteria for priority admittance. It is no surprise, in view of Lothian's stated policy of providing a nursery place for all four year olds, that the most frequently rated priority among teachers was the age of the child: 90% of teachers identified this. Slightly higher numbers of nursery nurses identified 'at risk' children as a priority than referred to the age of the child. The third most commonly identified priority for admittance among both teachers and nursery nurses was for children with 'special needs'.

One third of teachers and 40% of nursery nurses saw 'Children for whom English is a second language' as priority cases. The two least frequently rated criteria were 'children from single parent households' (5% of teachers, 11% of nursery nurses) and 'children whose parents are working' (1% of teachers and 2% of nursery nurses). While these lower priorities are not surprising in view of the stated aims of the nurseries, they may be of considerable importance for some parents. With low priority and few full-time places available it is not surprising that the number of women reporting working full-time who are using the nursery service is very small.

Parents reasons for using the nursery

By asking parents about their main reasons for using the nursery it was hoped to compare their responses to the aims and priorities given by teachers and nursery nurses (reported above). Parents indicated (97%) their main reasons for using the nursery by ticking as many as applicable, from a given list of reasons. The results are contained in Appendix Table 21. Of the seven given reasons for using the nursery the most commonly indicated was 'to help prepare their child for school'. The second and third most popular were 'giving the child a chance to mix with other children' (96%) and 'helping to educate the child' (86%). The three least common reasons given for using the nursery were, 'giving the parent a break from the child' (28%), 'allowing the parent to work' (11%), and 'allowing the parent to socialise with other adults' (9%). These results broadly line up with the aims of staff, where meeting a range of children's needs was given higher priority than meeting some parental need which was lower priority. However it should be borne in mind that those parents completing the questionnaire had obtained child education and care apparently suitable for their needs. Is there another population of full-time working parents who are excluded from nursery schools? The figures for 'rural position' parents in relation to their reasons for using the nursery were almost identical to those of the larger group of parents using the 'mainstream' nurseries.

Parents were asked to rate the happiness of their children in the nursery and their own happiness with the nursery on a four point scale (see Appendix Table 22). Almost three quarters of parents (74%) said that they were very happy with the nursery and a similar figure (79%) reported that their children were very happy in the nursery. Clearly there is a high degree of general satisfaction on the part of parents about the nursery that they use for their children and their perception of their children's happiness in the nursery.

Children with special needs

A final area for investigation in relation to how services meet the needs of children and their families relates to children with special needs. (see Appendix Table 23). Almost three quarters of responding centres reported having children who had 'major learning difficulties' while children who had 'severe social/emotional difficulties' were reported in 51% of the nurseries. Just under half reported the presence of children requiring 'a special diet' (49%) and children for whom 'English was a second language' (47%). The lowest incidence (27%) was recorded for centres who had children with 'severe physical disabilities'. The presence of a range of children with special needs appears to be largely confined to 'mainstream' nurseries. No 'rural position' nurseries reported the presence of children with special needs except for two reporting the presence of children who required special food or a special diet. Generally the figures for 'mainstream' nurseries indicate that large numbers of Lothian's nurseries have children with particular needs and this may be influencing staff inservice choices as described later. However, findings relate to centres reporting caring for one or more children with special needs, and do not indicate the number of children involved.

Summary of findings from Research Area 2

Four main points emerge from findings relating to this research question:

- 1 There was broad agreement between nursery nurses and teachers on what are the major aims and priorities of the nurseries.
 - 2 Priorities were defined largely with reference to children and not to any wider needs of the parent.
 - 3 Parents' reasons for using the nurseries broadly line up with the aims and priorities given by the staff.
 - 4 Overall parents report themselves and their children as very happy with the service.
-

Research Area 3

Do staff gain overall job satisfaction and are they content with the opportunities available for professional development?

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction on the part of teachers and nursery nurses is an important factor when attempting to deliver a quality service. People who are happy in their work will take a greater interest in it and are more likely to perform better. It therefore seemed important to attempt to gauge teachers' and nursery nurses' satisfaction with their present posts.

This satisfaction was recorded on a four point scale (see Appendix Table 24). The results indicate that the vast majority of staff (95% of teachers and 94% of nursery nurses) were at least fairly satisfied in their present posts. Just over half

(51%) of teachers said they were very satisfied; the figure for nursery nurses is lower at 43%.

The figures for being dissatisfied in one's present position were relatively low and very similar for both teachers and nursery nurses with 5% and 6%, respectively, reporting that they were dissatisfied or fairly dissatisfied.

Training and inservice

How well teachers and nursery nurses are qualified may well have a bearing on their effectiveness. A number of staff reported having extra qualifications beyond the basics. The figures for both teachers and nursery nurses were very similar, with 36% of teachers and 34% of nursery nurses saying that they possessed further training or qualifications. This represents a sizeable minority of the staff in Lothian's nurseries, and is likely to mean that extra resources are being made available to the staff.

Lothian also provides staff with inservice opportunities, both Regionally and school based. In general these opportunities were welcomed and used.

The vast majority of teachers (96%) and nursery nurses (88%) had attended Regional inservice programmes over the previous 18 months. Satisfaction levels with this inservice were fairly similar for the teachers and the nursery nurses. Just over one quarter of the nursery nurses (27%) and one-third (33%) of the teachers reported being very satisfied with the inservice. Only 7% of the teachers and 6% of the nursery nurses said they were fairly dissatisfied.

The numbers having attended school based inservice were almost identical to those for Regional inservice and satisfaction levels were similar. However, the number of teachers saying they were fairly dissatisfied with the school based inservice had risen slightly from 7% to 10%. With the nursery nurses the picture was slightly less clear. The number saying they were very satisfied with school based inservice had risen slightly from 27% to 34% for Regional inservice. The number of nursery nurses saying they were fairly dissatisfied was 7% for school based inservice as opposed to 6% for Regional inservice.

Staff were asked to select areas for further support or training from a pre-determined list. The overwhelming majority – 94% of teachers and 92% of nursery nurses – noted at least one area for further support or training, and each area was indicated by at least around one third of staff. Findings are shown in Appendix Table 25. The highest demands on the part of both nursery nurses and teachers were for 'working with children with special needs' and 'working with parents'.

There was also an appreciable demand by nursery nurses for 'interagency working' (30%) and by teachers for 'curriculum development' (36%). Both 'working with parents' and 'working with children who have special needs' have become increasingly important areas for development in the pre-five sector in recent years and the demand for inservice in these areas is likely to be a reflection of these higher profiles. Equally the demand for inservice training in working with children with special needs makes sense in view of the number of centres reported earlier as having children with a wide range of special needs. There was also an appreciable demand for training in 'counselling skills' and in 'planning and assessment'.

Summary of findings from Research Area 3

This section of the report has highlighted the following points:

- 1 The majority of teachers and nursery nurses were satisfied with their present jobs.
 - 2 A majority of the staff had received inservice in the recent past and were generally satisfied with it.
 - 3 Staff identified further areas for inservice requirements: their first priorities were working with parents and with children with special needs.
-

Research Area 4

What are the preferences held by both parents and staff concerning parental involvement in nursery education and how do these match with actual practices?

It has been increasingly recognised that involving parents in the education of their children is beneficial for the youngsters. However, what passes for involvement and satisfactory involvement is debatable. Both parents and teachers were asked for some basic information about parental involvement, for example, how parents were kept informed about the nursery, facilities available to them and the ways in which nurseries sought to involve parents.

Keeping parents informed

Teachers were asked to indicate from a pre-selected list ways in which they kept parents informed of the nurseries' activities and events. Results from this question can be found in Appendix Table 26. Teachers said that the most common methods of informing parents were through posting leaflets on notice boards (96%) and by talking with them when the children were being dropped off or collected from the nursery (also 96%). Both producing written profiles for parents about their children and producing a handbook/information sheet for new attenders were also very popular methods at 92% and 89% respectively. The least common methods of informing parents about the nursery were by visiting them at home (17%) or by advertising in the local press (12%).

Facilities for parents

By drawing on the experience gained in the SOED funded SCRE project 'Provision for Pre-fives in Scotland' we drew up a short list of the most likely facilities available to parents in a nursery setting and asked teachers to indicate those which they made available. The most common facility available to parents proved to be an information board, with 90% of teachers saying they made this available to parents. Just under half of the teachers (47%) indicated that they provided a parents' room in the nursery. Just under one-third of nurseries (30%) said they had a kitchen area available for parents. Twenty four percent of teachers said that parents had access to photocopying or telephone facilities. In a very small number of cases, 8%, teachers said they had no facilities for parents. In 17% of cases teachers indicated that they had some other facilities for parents.

Parental involvement

In attempting to unpack the nature of parental involvement we adopted three broad categories. The first could be thought of as situations where the exchange of information may take place. The second would involve parents at the 'extra pair of hands' level while the third would involve parents at the decision making and planning stages in the nursery. Generally fewer nurseries involve parents at level 2 or 3. The data collected from Lothian teachers and parents is presented in Appendix Table 27 and backs up this general picture with the most commonly reported involvement being inviting parents along to functions or events (92%) and the least common 'parents sharing with staff in planning the future of the work of the nursery' (12% of nurseries). Interestingly, the data for Lothian nurseries ranks 'working with children in the nursery' as the third most common response from teachers and fourth most common response from parents. This activity is often seen as an indicator of higher levels of parental involvement since it implicitly accepts that parents can work directly with children alongside the 'professional' in the nursery.

However, generally it is the case that Lothian nurseries were more likely to involve parents at the first and second stages of involvement than in the third level. This is not unexpected since parents are more likely to be able to find the time for one-off events and short term programmes than for longer running programmes or programmes requiring their sustained input, which are more likely to be found at level 3.

Parental knowledge of progress records

Access to information is on the agenda in many areas of life in Britain, and education is no exception. Parents are extremely interested in how their children are getting on at nursery. The first step in obtaining access to information is knowing that the information exists. Lothian Regional officials had made the researchers aware that all nursery schools keep records of children's progress. Parents were asked about their knowledge of these. A large number of parents (40%) either said no records were kept or that they did not know if progress records were kept on their children.

The majority of parents (60%) said that the nursery kept a record on the progress of their child. Just over half (55%) of these parents subsequently reported getting to see these records, while over three quarters (78%) said they discussed these records with staff. Far fewer parents said they received a copy of the record (23%) or wrote their own comments on the records (21%).

Summary of findings from Research Area 4

The key points from this section are:

- 1 While the most common parental involvement is to exchange information, there is some evidence to suggest that in Lothian nurseries it was quite common for parents to be involved in working with the children in the nursery.
 - 2 There appeared to be a gap in the knowledge of a large number of parents as to the existence of progress reports on their children.
-

5 Intra-agency and inter-agency working

Recently considerable interest has been shown in inter-agency working. It is generally held to have many benefits for professionals and parents alike. For professionals, these would be in the form of a better understanding of the work of other departments and agencies, and increased support for their own work. With greater understanding between and co-ordination of the work of different agencies, there should be an improvement in the services on offer to parents. Lothian Region has recognised such benefits and supports inter-agency courses, ie Certificate in Early Education at Moray House Institute which allows nursery nurses from social work and education, teachers, health visitors and social workers to learn together.

It was decided that collecting data on the number and extent of other agency/organisation contacts from the nurseries would be a useful exercise in gauging the levels and directions of inter-agency work.

One of the most important links that can be established by nurseries is that with primary schools. One of the most useful outcomes of this contact is the development of pre-entry programmes designed to ease the transition of children from nursery to school.

Teachers were asked about their involvement with primary schools on pre-entry programmes/liaison work. Ninety nine (65%) teachers said that they were involved in such work with some of the schools in the area, while a further 35 (23%) teachers reported being involved in such work with all of the primary schools in the area. Only 19 (12%) of the nurseries said they were not involved in any work with schools. Separating out the eleven 'rural position' nurseries the picture is somewhat different. Only three of these nurseries reported working with all schools in the area although six reported pre-entry work with some of the schools. Two said that they were not involved in any pre-entry work.

Since nursery classes are based in primary schools, we sought to find out if they were any more likely to be involved in pre entry work than nursery schools. On both variables, working with some of the schools, and working with all schools in an area, nursery schools were as likely to be involved in liaison work as nursery classes.

Headteachers and teachers were also asked about contact with other individuals and organisations and whether they received support for their work from these contacts. This data is presented in Appendix Table 28. The most commonly reported contact and support for the work of the nurseries in Lothian was from speech therapists with over half of the teachers (58%) saying they received support. This was followed by support from education officers/advisers and health visitors with 52% and 44% respectively being reported by teachers. At the

lower end of the scale 79% of teachers reported no contact with community education, 81% reported no contact with physiotherapists, and 93% reported no contact with pre-school community organisers.

We also asked the teachers about work with voluntary groups, for example, unemployed groups. Almost one fifth (19%) reported having worked with voluntary groups.

In addition to the questions about working with external agencies we also asked the teachers about the numbers of student teachers, nursery nurses, and secondary school pupils on work experience who had been in the school or class in the last 18 months. These results are compiled in Appendix Table 29. Over 80% of nurseries reported having had one or more of each type of trainee over the previous 18 months. Looking at the figures for nurseries who reported having had four or more students in any of the categories the percentages ranged from 31% for student teachers, through 39% for secondary school pupils to 46% for student nursery nurses: fairly sizeable proportions. Such numbers of trainees within the system, on a fairly regular basis, is likely to mean that they form a substantial resource for the nurseries accepting placements.

Summary findings emerging from this data are:

- 1 Well over three-quarters of nurseries in Lothian Region are involved in pre-entry work with primary schools.
 - 2 Fairly large numbers of nurseries reported getting support from other professionals including speech therapists, health visitors and psychologists. Just over half of the nurseries said they received support from education officers and advisers.
 - 3 A large number of nurseries report having various students on placement with them over the last 18 months.
-

Technical Appendices

Table 1 *Ethnic groupings of staff by nurseries—staff survey*

Ethnic group	Number of nurseries
Indian	2
Pakistani	6
Chinese	1
Asian British	2
Asian other	1
African	1
Black British	2
White British	108
White other	7
Other European	1
N=	117

Table 2 *Working status of respondents—parental survey*

Working status	% 'mainstream' nursery users	% 'rural position' nursery users
Part-time working	43	37
Full time working	10	12
Unemployed	47	51
N=	883	81

Table 3 *Working status of partner—parental survey*

Working status	% 'mainstream' nursery users	% 'rural position' nursery users
Part-time working	4	4
Full time working	74	80
Unemployed	7	11
No partner	15	6
N=	902	84

Table 4 *Number of days child spent at nursery in week—staff survey*

Number of Days	% 'Mainstream' users	% 'Rural position' users
1 day	0	1
2 days	<1	98
3 days	3	N/a
4 days	15	N/a
5 days	82	N/a
N=	913	85

Table 5 *Which other childcare services used—parental survey*

Other services	% 'Mainstream' users	% 'Rural position' users
Childminders	7	6
Other nursery LA	1	2
Playgroup	2	38
Private nursery	1	9
Family or friend	21	19
Other service or support	2	4
N=	912	85

Table 6 *Benefits for children of nursery attendance; ranked responses to open question*

	Parents	Teachers	Nursery Nurses
1	Socialising with other children 84%	General all round development of child 78%	General all round development of child 77%
2	General all round development of child 35%	Socialising with other children 42%	Socialising with other children 28%
3	Preparation for school 35%	Educational development 42%	Educational development 28%
4	Educational development 27%	Safe and caring environment 34%	Preparation for school 23%
5	Access to new equipment and resources 21%	Access to new equipment and resources 32%	Access to new equipment and resources 20%
6	Child stimulated and more responsive at home 5%	Preparation for school 23%	Safe and caring environment 20%
N=	979	155	339

Below this the numbers mentioning specific benefits are very small.

Table 7 *Ranking of disadvantages for children attending nursery school
(of those respondents who identified disadvantages)*

	Parents	Teachers	Nursery Nurses
1	Provision is only part-time 29%	Premises or environment lacking 31%	Environment doesn't suit all children 26%
2	Premises or environment lacking 11%	Day too long for some children 25%	Provision is only part-time 22%
3	Have to travel a distance 11%	Provision is only part-time 22%	Lack of staff 15%
4	Day too long for some children 1%	Lack of staff 21%	Premises or environment lacking 13%
5	—	Lack of provision for special needs children 4%	Lack of provision for special needs children 6%
6	—	Users have to travel a distance 3%	Users have to travel a distance 3%
N=	73	68	87

Table 8 *Ranking of parental suggestions for improvements to Lothian's service*

	Percentage of 'mainstream' parents parents	Percentage of 'rural position' parents
1	More resources available for nursery 32%	Extend provision for child 70%
2	More places available for children 28%	More resources available for nursery 16%
3	Provision for children under 4 20%	More places available for children 15%
4	Extend provision for child 15%	Provision for children under 4 10%
5	More or new activities for children 6%	More or new activities for children 6%
6	Better contact between nursery and the Region 2%	Better contact between nursery and the Region 2%
N=	909	84

Table 9 *Rating the nursery—parents survey*

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Happy with the care and safety of child	87	12	1	0
Nursery staff helpful	87	12	1	0
Happy with activities that child engaged in	81	17	2	0
Happy with child's education	78	19	2	1
Informed about the nurseries work	58	31	10	1
Consulted over changes in the nursery	45	28	15	11
N=998				

Table 10 *Preparation for school—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	56	71
Important	37	26
Less Important	6	3
Hardly Important	1	0
N=	155	348

Table 11 *Opportunity for children to mix with other children—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	86	89
Important	14	10
Less Important	0	1
Hardly Important	0	0
N=	153	341

Table 12 *Opportunity for parents to socialise with other adult—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	13	14
Important	48	53
Less Important	35	30
Hardly Important	4	3
N=	153	338

Table 13 *High quality environment for the children—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	97	87
Important	3	13
Less Important	0	0
Hardly Important	0	0
N=	155	343

Table 14 *Helping to develop children's language—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	97	91
Important	3	8
Less Important	0	1
Hardly Important	0	0
N=	156	340

Table 15 *Giving parents respite from their children—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	9	7
Important	36	37
Less Important	44	43
Hardly Important	10	12
N=	155	339

Table 16 *Allowing parents to train/attend work—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	5	3
Important	26	24
Less Important	49	53
Hardly Important	20	19
N=	155	341

Table 17 *Allowing parents to return to education—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	6	5
Important	31	28
Less Important	45	50
Hardly Important	17	16
N=	154	337

Table 18 *Providing a place for children at risk—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	57	66
Important	34	27
Less Important	6	4
Hardly Important	2	2
N=	154	342

Table 19 *Providing a place for children with special needs—staff survey*

Ranking	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very Important	49	57
Important	41	37
Less Important	9	5
Hardly Important	1	1
N=	155	338

Table 20 *Ranking of which children get priority—staff survey*

Rank	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
1	Age of the child 90%	Child is 'at risk' 82%
2	Child is 'at risk' 80%	Age of the child 80%
3	Child has special needs 77%	Child has special needs 74%
4	Child does not have English as a first language 33%	Child does not have English as a first language 40%
5	Child from single parent household 5%	Child from single parent household 11%
6	Child's parents are working 1%	Child's parents are working 2%
N=	156	348

Table 21 *Ranking of parent's reasons for using the nursery*

Rank	Reason for nursery use	Percentage
1	To help prepare child for school	97
2	To give child opportunity to mix with other children	96
3	To help educate child	86
4	To give child a break from parent	39
5	To give parent a break from child	28
6	To let parent work	11
7	To give parent the chance to mix with other parents	9
N=		997

Table 22 *Parent's reporting of their own and their children's happiness in nursery*

Happiness	Children	Parents
Very happy	79	74
Happy	20	26
Unhappy	<1	1
Very unhappy	<1	1
Totals	996	991

Table 23 *Centres reporting children with special needs*

Special Need	Percentage
Children requiring special food/diet	49
Children for whom English is a second language	47
Children with severe physical disabilities	27
Children with major learning difficulties	72
Children with severe social/emotional difficulties	51
N=	156

Table 24 *Staff satisfaction in present post*

Satisfaction rating	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
Very satisfied	51	43
Fairly satisfied	44	51
Fairly unsatisfied	3	5
Unsatisfied	2	1
N=	154	345

Table 25 *Ranking of areas for support/training on inservice programme—staff survey*

Rank	Teachers %	Nursery Nurses %
1	Working with children who have special needs 52%	Working with children who have special needs 51%
2	Working with parents 45%	Working with parents 48%
3	Counselling skills 43%	Counselling skills 41%
4	Management and organisational development 42%	Planning and assessment 34%
5	Interagency working 42%	Curriculum development 32%
6	Planning and assessment 42%	Interagency working 30%
7	Curriculum development 36%	—
N=	154	346

Table 26 *Keeping parents informed—staff survey*

Methods used to inform parents	% of centres
Post up leaflets on noticeboard	96
Talk with parents at drop off or pick up time	96
Produce written profiles for parents about their children	92
Produce a handbook or information sheet for new attenders	89
Produce a regular newsletter	67
Hold parents meetings on a regular basis	58
Telephone parents regularly	25
Home visit	17
Advertise in local newsheets or papers	12
N=	156
26% said they used other methods	

Table 27 *Ranking of parental involvement in the nursery—staff and parent survey*

Rank	Centre %	Parents %
1	Parents invited to attend functions/ open days 92%	Invited to attend functions/ open days 78%
2	Organising fund raising events 83%	Organising fund raising events 32%
3	Working with children in the nursery 70%	Dropping in for a cup of tea/chat 21%
4	Following suggestions for working at home with the children 63%	Working with children in the nursery 20%
5	Performing auxiliary services 56%	Following suggestions for working at home with the children 19%
6	Having open access to information held by centre 50%	Performing auxiliary services 16%
7	Dropping in for a cup of tea/chat 49%	Having open access to information held by centre 13%
8	Helping to assess their own children 33%	Helping to assess their own children 11%
9	Sharing in the planning of day to day activities with staff 17%	Sharing with staff in planning the future work of the nursery 4%
10	Sharing with staff in planning the future work of the nursery 12%	Sharing in the planning of day to day activities with staff 2%
N=	156	988

Table 28 *Contact/support with other individuals and organisations—staff survey*

Professionals or Agencies	% No contact	% Contact	% Support
Speech Therapists	10	32	58
Education Officers/ Advisers	14	35	52
Health Visitors	19	38	44
Psychological services	25	32	43
Social Work	46	32	22
Community Education	79	15	6
Physiotherapists	81	5	14
Pre-school Community Organiser	93	4	3
N=156			

Table 29 *Students and trainees in the nursery since August 1992*

Number	% Student Teachers	% Student Nursery Nurses	% Secondary School Pupils
0	18	17	15
1 to 3	51	36	46
4 or more	31	46	39
N=	142	138	142

SCRE PR 95/004 19 April 1995



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Educational Provision for Pre-fives in Lothian Region

The report of a survey of the views of Lothian Region parents and staff on educational provision for children under five is published by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) today. The research, which was commissioned by Lothian Region, focused on nursery schools and classes provided by the Region's Education Department, including the part-time nurseries (known as 'rural position' nurseries) operating two days a week only.

Parents generally felt very happy with the nursery school or class their children attended but would like more provision to be available. Suggested improvements involved more places, giving children more time at nursery and allowing more younger children into the system. Helping children prepare for school, giving them the chance to mix with other children and contributing to the child's education were the main reasons parents gave for using the services.

Over 80% of the children attending 'mainstream' nurseries used them on five days a week, part-time (morning or afternoon). Just over a quarter of children attending 'mainstream' nursery provision and well over half of those attending 'rural provision' nurseries also used other child care services.

A majority of 'mainstream' nurseries reported having one child or more with special needs. These needs varied but included having one child or more with major learning difficulties (reported by 72% of centres), requirements for special diets (49% of centres), a first language other than English (47% of centres), social/ emotional difficulties (51% of centres) and severe physical disabilities (27% of centres). The most commonly reported sources of support were speech therapists (58%), education officers/ advisers (52%), health visitors (44%) and the psychological services (43%). Well over three quarters of nursery schools and classes were involved in pre-entry work with primary schools.

Staff saw their main aims as developing children's language skills, giving children the chance to mix with others and providing a high quality environment. Nursery staff agreed that the most important criteria for deciding whether a child should have priority for a place were: the age of the child, children 'at risk' and children with special needs. Nursery nurses gave higher priority to the 'at risk' category and nursery teachers to age.

The majority of staff were satisfied with their present jobs. A majority had attended in-service programmes in the recent past but over 90% of both teachers and nursery nurses indicated at least one area where they were interested in future training. The greatest demands were for training for working with children with special needs and for working with parents.

The most common type of family using the Region's pre-five educational centres was one with two carers where the male worked full-time and the female either stayed at home or worked part-time. However 14% of those participating in the survey were from single parent households. The most common form of parental involvement was inviting parents to functions or events (92%) and the least common parents sharing with staff in planning the future work of the nursery (12%). 40% of parents were unaware that the nurseries kept a record of the progress of individual children but three quarters of those who were aware of records had discussed the content with the staff.

Notes to editors

1. The survey was carried out in early 1994. All 175 nursery education establishments in the Region were sent questionnaires for head teachers, teachers in charge of nursery classes and a sample of more than 400 nursery nurses. Over 1100 parents were also surveyed. The response rate was high, over 83% for all categories of respondent.

2. The report, entitled *Educational Provision for Pre-Fives in Lothian Region: a summary of the views of parents and staff* (authors Stuart Hall and Janet Powney) is available from SCRE, price £5.00.

3. Further information about the research is available from Rosemary Wake at SCRE. Enquiries about Lothian Region's pre-five education services should be directed to Val Miller, Press /Media Officer, Lothian Region (Tel: 0131 479 2149)

Rosemary Wake

Head of Information Services, SCRE

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Research in the service of education is the motto of the Scottish Council for Research in Education. For over 60 years it has put this into action through carrying out research studies in schools and other institutions across the educational system at all levels from pre-school to adult and vocational education. It also provides a range of associated research information and communication services. SCREF aims to make documents arising from its own research available to those who are interested. Reports in the Project Report series are not specifically prepared for publication. Enquiries about SCREF publications are welcome and should be directed to Information Services.

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